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ABSTRACT

What many educators see as the assistance of a program evaluation is often an intrusion into the governance of the program being evaluated. Redistribution of authority and control occur not only because evaluation findings support one constituency more than another, but the very act of evaluating affords protective status to the initiators of the evaluation and at-risk status to those under review. Most evaluators try to be fair, but within the framework of a complex ideological milieu, conflicts of interest are inevitable, and evaluation both intentionally and subversively changes the way programs are governed. An example of such intrusion can be seen in the evaluation of the Cities-in-Schools program conducted by the American Institutes for Research. The program, established to help troubled students, was not set up for hypothesis testing and lacked managerial uniformity, record-keeping structures, and other evaluation requisites. Various advocacy groups vied for ideological control of the study. Evaluation needs led to standardizing program operations, hiring new managers, and in other ways preempting not only the procedures but also the purposes of the entire program. Because program governance is always affected to some degree by evaluation, evaluators should openly acknowledge their influence and pledge to minimize its effect. (IW)

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EVALUATION AS INTRUSION INTO GOVERNANCE[1]

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Among the many considerations in program evaluation work is the resulting modification of governance, and more, the redistribution of authority and control. Changes occur not only because evaluation findings support one constituency more than another, but the act of evaluating itself affords protective status to those who initiate the evaluation and at-risk status to those under review. In my evaluation work I have found evaluation both intentionally and subversively aimed at changing the way programs are governed.

Considered in the abstract, evaluation is good. Informal evaluation is an ordinary exercise of responsibility. Formal evaluation is expected for effective supervision of operations. In the eyes of most people, to an extent, those who evaluate and those who commission evaluation--and even those who have evaluation plans and findings at their disposal--are seen as good. With the perception of goodness comes an increment of authority and a reinforcement of, a reification of, control. A perceived goodness of evaluation substantiates control.

This perception of added goodness is unwarranted. Those who exercise evaluation authority use it no more for good than they use other management and control techniques. Often evaluation is used for improvement of general well-being. Often it is used for accountability, to protect the public investment. But also patrons and critics alike use the process and products of evaluation to further selfish aims. Meticulously or unconsciously evaluators select issues and standards that in effect advocate a particular point of view.

The very design of a study declares one view of a program to be superior. When managers commission a study they regularly do so presumptuously: their stated goals are presumed to be the proper goals, their criteria are presumed to be the proper criteria. Although identifying goals and criteria is a legitimate function of management, blind acceptance is not an evaluator's obligation. As Scriven long ago pointed out in advocacy of "goal free evaluation," an evaluation specialist who considers only the goals of those commissioning the study acts irresponsibly (1973).

Though often not recognized as such, the evaluator is an agent or representative not of just one position but of several. Representation of various stakeholder positions, in reality, is complex, diffuse, and problematic. Regularly evaluators give priority to managers, but consider other constituencies as well. Regularly evaluators working on site "go native," increasingly adopting the views and values of program operators, teachers and students. Most evaluators try hard to be fair, but within a framework set collectively by their contract, scientific

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discipline, and prospects for future assignment. It is a complex idealogical milieu. It is a situation in which evaluation changes the power of adversaries.

As a case in point I would like to describe briefly the evaluation of Cities-in-Schools. The methodological approach can be categorized as "stakeholder evaluation," an approach described in the 1982 issue of New Directions in Program Evaluation edited by Tony Bryk. I will be quoting from my meta-evaluation case study entitled Quieting Reform.

The evaluator of Cities-in-Schools was Charles Murray of the American Institutes for Research. In October 1977 Murray began a federally sponsored evaluation of the Cities-in-Schools program in Atlanta, Indianapolis, and New York City. He believed that the CIS program had a good chance of successfully coordinating youth services in each city and of drawing the most intransigent or estranged young people into ordinary, desirable educational and social behaviors. He further believed that his research would provide good evidence of CIS program success and failure--and additionally provide policy-relevant generalizations for program administrators in cities, school districts, and funding agencies across the country.

Three and a half years later a final draft of Murray's evaluation report was distributed to various "stakeholder" groups. The report said that the project had provided sustained face-to-face assistance to the most troubled youth but had not succeeded in coordinating social service agencies, or in delivering an improved educational program, or in permanently uplifting the youth. The Cities-in-Schools program had fallen far short of its promises.

The evaluation study itself was distinguished. It was undertaken by an eminent educational research group. Its conception began with HEW Secretary Joseph Califano and NIE Director Patricia Graham. It was considered important enough to justify a separate NIE contract for technical assistance from the Evaluation Research Society. Seeing the political issues, NIE's program spokesperson and monitor Norman Gold insisted on a "stakeholder approach."

The evaluation design (quasi-experimental) was based on the RFP and on previous AIR studies, and on an interest by AIR President Paul Schwarz in someday designing an urban youth program. The three student-performance criteria would be: attendance in class, gain on achievement tests, and staying out of trouble with the police. Out in the field the design was elaborated by asking stakeholder groups what they wanted to know.

Four articulate advocacy groups were recognized: (1) program originators led by urban youthworker Bill Milliken; (2) government leaders such as then-Governor Richard Lugar of Indiana and President Jimmy Carter; (3) members of the business community and foundations; and (4) school leaders. Parents were found to be diverse and inarticulate; to Murray it appeared that parent concerns were covered in AIR's original list of variables. Teachers and social-service personnel were not questioned.

Still another advocacy group emerged to vie for idealogical control of the evaluation study: the ERS panel of evaluation specialists. They too were diverse and at times inarticulate, but (as they were supposed to) they insisted upon maintaining the integrity of the experiment. This became problematic when it was learned that the Cities-in-Schools program lacked uniformity across its many sites, that untrained CETA workers were representing social-service agencies, that many only mildly troubled students were participating, that records were not being kept by the youthworkers, and so on.

The majority of the evaluation specialists urged Murray to pressure CIS management to straighten things out. He did so. CIS leaders realized the disarray. They did not know how to spend the millions of dollars suddenly available. They were intent upon helping youngsters, as many as they could as soon as they could--not in hypothesis testing. Evaluation was required by their funding. They wanted the record to show how well they were doing. They did not oppose evaluation, until the pressures came. The Black CIS leaders particularly were not happy being told by white colleagues, advisors, sponsors and evaluators how to manage their affairs.

After all, it was their program. Or was it? Bill Milliken treated it as his program. CIS Board Chairman Howard Samuels treated it as his program. The school districts wanted to treat it as their program. HEW exercised certain proprietary rights. The evaluators felt that nothing good would come of it if it remained so disorganized.

How was governance forcefully reshaped by the evaluation study? New managers were hired. Operations were standardized. The untrained lost status. The evaluation study was just one of several influences, but according to testimony, its influence was felt. Bill Milliken and Norm Gold said so. According to Howard Samuels early evaluation returns only told of troubles already known, but he hastened to set up a management information system to have his own data to wield. Pat Graham was not about to caution evaluators against intruding into governance. The presence of evaluation, the opportunity to evaluate, and the obligation to evaluate, were impacting not just the procedures but even the purposes of Cities-in-Schools. Yet essentially no one challenged the propriety.

In the end, CIS workers knew they had not achieved the promised changes in attendance, achievement, and legal infractions--but they also knew they had "done right" by those young people; achieving, they said, "many a turnabout." Early on, they had had a sense of what was good, and the evaluation study had pre-empted it. Charles Murray was fully aware of what he was doing, and believed he was doing the right thing as he caused the staff to direct efforts away from providing services toward improving program administration.

We evaluators look for guidance in such matters in our statement of professional standards, the Joint Standards for Evaluations of Educational Programs, Projects and Materials which Dan Stufflebeam and his many associates brought into being in 1981. The most relevant section is: C2, Conflict of Interest. It reads:

> Conflict of interest, frequently unavoidable, should be dealt with openly and honestly, so that it does not compromise the evaluation processes and results.

Frequently unavoidable? No, conflict of interest exists in all evaluations. It is ever unavoidable. In elaboration, Standard C2 refers to situations in which evaluator interests are caught up. The standard greatly understates the problem. Conflicts are affected by evaluator action regardless of the evaluators' private interests. Standard C2 and others in this section are narrow, consistently implying that evaluators who deal openly and honestly with the conflicts they recognize will be okay. That is not enough. As I see it, evaluators should acknowledge they will be giving some unwarranted support to certain interests and will be putting others at some unwarranted disadvantage.

I presented only one case here, a case in which program governance was deliberately and intrusively affected by evaluation. I claim that though usually to a lesser degree, governance is always affected by evaluation. Impact on governance is an integral part of formal evaluation. I prefer that evaluators pledge themselves to minimize their influence on governance, even to reject the aspiration that evaluation contributes to the reform of governance. What many of us see as assistance, or at least good intention, is in fact intrusion into the governance of the program.

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